

# Sustainable Design in Southwest China

*American Institute of Architects*

*May 19-28, 2014*

The American Institute of Architects' Housing Knowledge Community is partnering with the Center for Leadership in Global Sustainability at Virginia Tech (CLiGS) and the Yunnan Sustainability Network to offer a professional development and service learning opportunity in southwestern China to members of the AIA. Through this 10-day program,

we will explore the opportunities and challenges to conceptualize, communicate, and develop sustainable housing and communities. Our itinerary will take us from Beijing and Shanghai to several communities in Yunnan, China's most diverse province, ethnically, biologically, and ecologically. There we will explore the interactivity between Yunnan's natural and cultural landscape and the rapid growth of China's economy.



## Objectives for this program:

- Explore the patterns and forms of traditional and contemporary housing, planning, and development in China, with particular emphasis on the local cultural traditions, knowledge, and practices in Yunnan Province.
- Examine technologies, materials, infrastructure, and living systems employed in traditional, prevailing, and experimental housing development, with emphasis on the challenges of sustainability.
- Analyze case studies of proposed approaches to housing development for health, sustainability, and quality-of-life impacts.
- Identify and assess strategies for improving the environmental, social, economic, and design performance of existing and proposed housing development and identify opportunities for the AIA Housing Knowledge Community to participate further.



## Program itinerary

This program is scheduled for ten days in China, not including travel to and from the US. The group will meet in Beijing, travel to and within Yunnan Province and conclude in Shanghai. The majority of our time will be spent in Yunnan Province. We will explore three unique areas within Yunnan Province – Dali, Lijiang, and Gyalthang (also known as “Shangri-La”) – all of which are experiencing dramatic and rapid economic, cultural, and development change with profound implications for local communities. Participants will have an opportunity to add additional time to either end of the trip to explore other areas of China or Asia.

### Beijing (Day 1)

The group will convene in Beijing for a welcome reception and introduction to the week. Arrive early to visit the Forbidden City and experience the symbolic code that resonates in traditional architecture throughout China. The key themes of harmony, cosmology, family structure, and social hierarchies are inscribed in traditional imperial architecture.

*Lodging: Beijing TBD (1 night)*

### Yunnan

Throughout China and in the small towns and villages of Yunnan province there has been a tremendous building boom, in which farming houses built of local materials through labor exchanges are being replaced with larger homes oriented toward consumption and private space. This transformation reflects various trends associated with economic development – increased cash flows from outbound migrant labor, availability of new materials such as concrete and glass windows, the advent of running water and flush toilets, and the declining importance of traditional agriculture. With the rapid increase of wage labor and the rising tourist economy, how can new homes support sustainable livelihoods in the region? How can traditional architecture and folkways negotiate the sweeping changes brought by rapid modernization? The distinct regional and ethnic identities of communities in Yunnan province offer case studies that engage these crucial questions of sustainability in China.



*A typical Bai house is built with three buildings forming a U shape and a fourth wall used as a screen wall, which is used to reflect light into the rooms. Linden Centre.*

### Dali & Xizhou Village (Day 2-4)

With dramatic mountain ranges delineating the basin boundary and Erhai Lake at the center, the Dali region is characterized by the architecture and colors of the Bai culture, by extensive alluvial fields, intensively cultivated, and by ancient villages . . . with new construction springing up everywhere. Old Town Dali, which dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> Century Ming Dynasty, is located at the southern tip of the lake and serves as a

major tourism destination for the region, drawing domestic and foreign visitors to wander its narrow bustling streets. Further north up the lake is Xizhou Village, whose Bai character remains, despite increasing pressure from tourism and economic development. Leaders in the conservation of cultural integrity in this village have been Brian and Jeanee Linden, developers and proprietors of the Linden Centre, an award winning boutique hotel in Xizhou, where our group will stay. We will spend time with Brian, a CLiGS Fellow, and Jeanee as they lead us through the story of their decade of historical and cultural preservation work in locations across China, primarily in Xizhou Village.

In Dali, we will meet with local leaders and Dali University faculty members to discuss the area's goals and strategies for development, housing, and community services. These discussions will lay the foundation for a potential long-term study on sustainable development in the region co-sponsored by the Yunnan Sustainability Network and the AIA.

*Lodging: Linden Centre, Xizhou Village (3 nights)*

### **Lijiang & surrounding area (Day 5-6)**

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Lijiang is a trading town dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Maintaining a still functional system of intricate waterways and bridges, Old Town Lijiang is heavily influenced by the Naxi culture, although the variety of architectural influences reflects the diaspora of cultures that characterize any centuries-old trading town. Lijiang has become a major tourism draw for the region, with 8 million visitors in 2012 alone. This volume of visitors creates conflict between access and authenticity and stresses the city's economy, infrastructure, and community. The Old City as a traditional place of residence must now compete with commercial real estate use. We will explore two 'old towns' – one fundamentally changed by tourism, and one still thriving as a working village – and compare the issues around housing with local experts. We will also include time to explore the magnificent landscape around Lijiang.

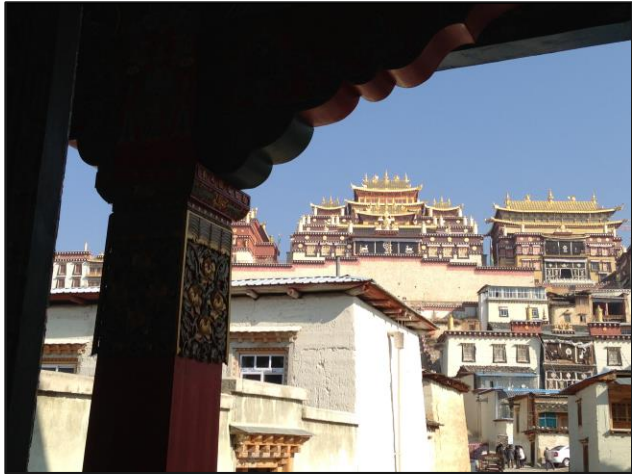


*Lodging: Lijiang – TBD (2 nights)*

### **Shangri-La (Days 6-8)**

From Lijiang, we will travel up onto the Tibetan Plateau to experience a third distinct region of Yunnan Province – Shangri-La. Located along the Tibetan-Chinese border at almost 10,000 feet above sea level, Shangri-La's landscape is markedly different, and the Tibetan cultural influence is significantly more pronounced, than at lower elevations in Yunnan Province. This is manifest in the building practices, land use patterns, natural resource stocks, culture, and economy. Enormous Buddhist monasteries overlooking the snow-capped Himalayas impart a cultural flavor unique within China. We will explore





traditional regional structures including private homes, mainstreet buildings, grand monasteries, and Buddhist temples that speckle the hillsides. Of particular interest is the current housing boom in “traditional” Tibetan timber and rammed-earth home construction with the accompanying challenges of timber supply and land use conversion.

*Lodging: Shangri-la – Banyan Tree Ringha (2 nights)*

## Shanghai (Day 9-10)

The program will conclude in the megacity of Shanghai, where our previous week in Yunnan Province will intensify the contrasts between the ancient and modern China. We will tour the Shanghai Urban Planning Museum, which does a remarkable job telling the story of the city’s development, past and continuing, from its time as a colonial port (reminiscent along the Bund), to its modern day skyline just across the river. The program will conclude that evening with a farewell reception.

[**Note:** there will be add-on options for additional time in Shanghai]

*Lodging: Shanghai TBD*



## Draft Itinerary

	AM	PM	Lodging
Day 1 – May 19		Meet in Beijing	Beijing
Day 2 – May 20	Fly to Lijiang Drive to Dali	XIZHOU VILLAGE	Xizhou - Linden Centre
Day 3 – May 21	XIZHOU	XIZHOU	Xizhou - Linden Centre
Day 4 – May 22	DALI/ XIZHOU	DALI/ XIZHOU	Linden Centre
Day 5 – May 23	Early drive to Lijiang	LIJIANG	Lijiang
Day 6 – May 24	Excursions Around Lijiang	Excursions Around Lijiang	Lijiang
Day 7 – May 25	Drive to Shangri-La	SHANGRI-LA	Shangri-La - Banyan Tree Ringha
Day 8 – May 26	SHANGRI-LA	SHANGRI-LA	Shangri-La - Banyan Tree Ringha
Day 9 – May 27	To Shanghai	SHANGHAI	Shanghai Westin
Day 10 – May 28	SHANGHAI	SHANGHAI • Closing reception/ END	[not included] Shanghai Westin

- Estimated cost per person is \$2950 based on double-occupancy. Includes in-country travel, lodging, meals, and activities. Upgrade to single-occupancy is an additional \$400.
- Given the limited occupancy of many of the places we would be staying and logistics involved, this program would be limited to 24 participants.